



The Education Trust

# ACHIEVING EQUITABLE ACCESS TO STRONG TEACHERS: A GUIDE FOR DISTRICT LEADERS

BY MARNI BROMBERG | APRIL 2016

Ten years ago, in one of their periodic forays into district data, a team of leaders in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools was troubled to find that students in the highest poverty, mostly black, schools were taught by fewer of the district's most effective teachers and disproportionately more of its least effective teachers. Later that year, after consulting with some of the district's most respected teachers, the team launched a "Strategic Staffing Initiative" that, over time, has considerably changed patterns of access to effective teachers. The initiative made leading and teaching in high-poverty schools among the most prestigious — though still certainly not the easiest — assignments that educators in Charlotte could be called upon to take.

Charlotte isn't the only district that has stepped up to challenge long-standing patterns of inequity in who teaches whom. Many districts, including a handful of large districts The Education Trust convenes regularly, are taking important steps to systematically tackle this problem.

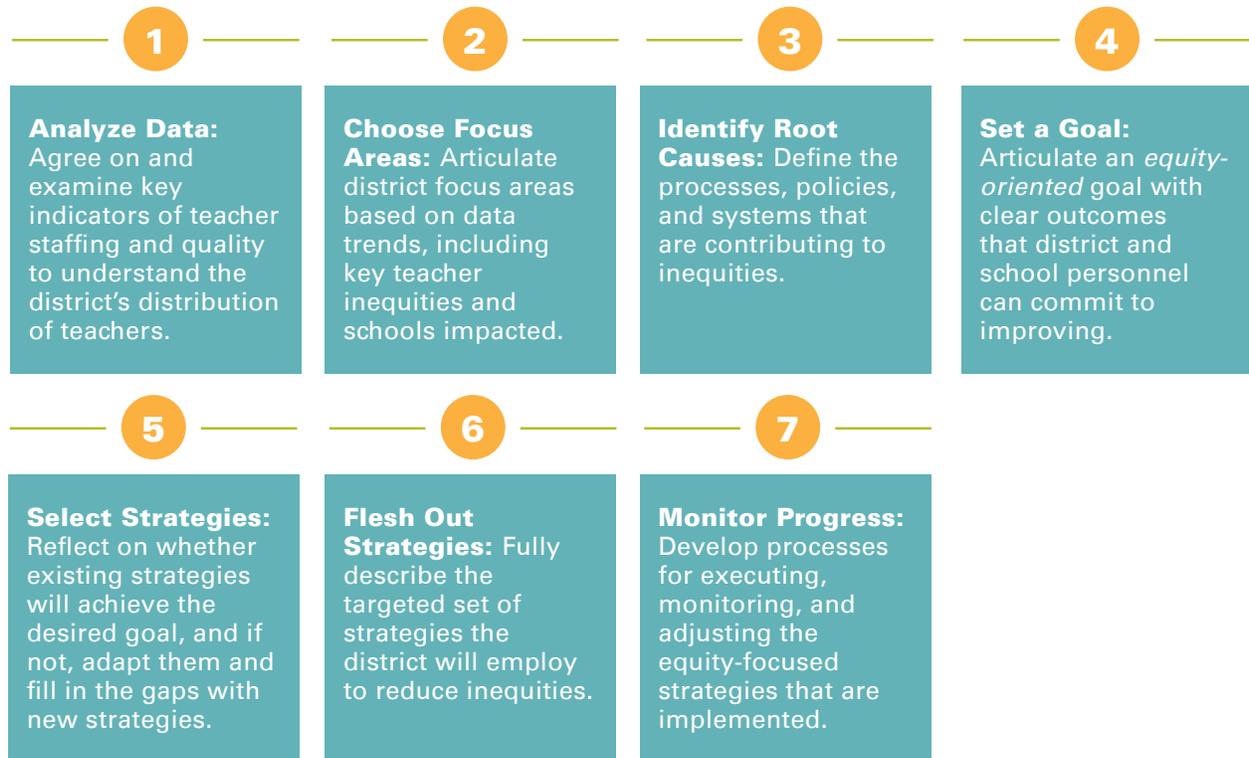
Solving it isn't easy, for it has complex roots. And certainly teachers, even effective ones, are by no means all that children growing up in poverty need in order to reach their full potential. But while there are some things that districts **can't** control in the lives of low-income children and children of color, there are some things that they **can**. And among those, the quality of the teaching force is the single most important.

The purpose of this guide is to help district leaders take on the challenge of ensuring that students have equitable access to excellent teachers. It shares some early lessons we have learned from districts about the levers available to prioritize low-income students and students of color in teacher quality initiatives. The guide outlines a seven-stage process that can help leaders define their own challenges, explore underlying causes, and develop strategies to ensure all schools and students have equitable access to effective teachers.

## THE PROCESS:

This resource is organized around seven stages that build upon one another. Because many districts have already started a process to understand and improve student access to strong teachers, our partners at the Education Delivery Institute have co-released a [complementary self-assessment](#) that helps district teams reflect on where they currently are and determine which stage is most beneficial for them to enter.

### The seven stages are:



## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE:

Changing long-established teacher patterns is a challenging undertaking, with no one-size-fits-all answer. But, district leaders can use this guide to reflect on an approach that would work within their own context and consider challenges and solutions that have been voiced by other districts.

To provide a full picture of the actions, each stage in the process offers similar information, including:

- 1. What to do:** A description of how district teams can approach the stage
- 2. Key questions to consider:** A set of reflection questions that district teams can use to think more deeply about each stage
- 3. Common challenges:** Common stumbling blocks and examples of how other districts have approached them

Many of the stages also contain an **example** of how a district could approach the stage, to illustrate district planning or action.

## CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS:

- **Building a team:** To ensure that efforts are coherent and well-coordinated, it is essential that a diverse team be part of the planning and oversight process. Representation may come from offices of human capital, academics, principal supervisors, research and accountability, finance, and possibly others, depending on each district's structure. Generally speaking, though, the district team should be comprised of individuals who oversee this work as a whole, as well as those who own the implementation of individual strategies designed to alter the distribution of teachers in the district.
- **Communication:** Effective leaders communicate through both word and deed the importance of equitable access to high-quality teaching. Inadequate communication is the Achilles' heel of too many education initiatives, resulting in a lack of buy-in or action, or both. It is important to consider how to communicate *and* listen to stakeholders about: 1) chosen indicators of teacher quality, 2) goals that prioritize equity, and 3) strategies that require action from various people throughout the system. This tool contains questions and considerations to prompt leaders to think about the relationship between two-way communication, buy-in, and action.
- **State efforts:** States are in the process of implementing plans aimed at addressing inequities in access to strong teachers. As districts develop their own plans, they should learn what's in their state's plan to understand what might be expected of them and whether the state is providing useful data or resources. Each state's plan is available here: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/resources.html>. In the coming months, EdTrust will publish analyses of the plans.
- **Critical friends:** The districts we have worked with have been part of a network focused on ensuring students have equitable access to high-quality teachers. Within the network, districts act as thought-partners and help each other remain focused on the issue. Other district leaders might consider consulting with partner districts or community organizations to exchange ideas and help maintain a focus on equity.
- **Timelines:** Human capital policies and processes that seek to alter culture or capacity do not result in huge changes overnight. However, given the damage done to our most vulnerable students every year that school systems ignore this problem, district teams have a responsibility to set aggressive timelines and develop systems for meeting them. It would be easy for district teams to get caught up in consensus-building phases and get indefinitely stalled. Alternatively, teams may try to rush through the early steps and miss important pieces of context, which could impede progress later on. To eliminate some of these challenges, the districts we've worked with have set two- or three-year goals to provide a reasonable window for planning and implementation, but to avoid getting stuck in any one phase.

# ANALYZE THE DATA

## AGREE ON AND EXAMINE KEY INDICATORS OF TEACHER STAFFING AND QUALITY TO UNDERSTAND THE DISTRICT'S DISTRIBUTION OF TEACHERS.

### WHAT TO DO:

District leaders typically have a wealth of data at their disposal, but they can start the analysis by looking at human capital metrics that impact student learning from an equity perspective. For example, district leaders regularly track metrics like vacancies and retention rates, but many have not compared these metrics in their highest versus lowest poverty schools. The following indicators provide a jumping-off point, but district leaders should ultimately select indicators based on data availability, context, and district values.

### Indicators to Consider for Analysis

Teacher Indicator	Suggested Data Definition
<i>New teachers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The percent of teachers who are in their first year teaching</li> </ul>
<i>Out-of-field teaching</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The percent of core academic courses with teachers who have neither a certification nor academic major in that subject area</li> <li>Because content area knowledge is particularly important at the secondary level, districts may want to examine this indicator in high schools only.</li> </ul>
<i>Effective teachers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The percent of teachers receiving a very top or bottom evaluation rating</li> <li>Districts should only use evaluation ratings once they are sure that evaluation systems are generating stable, reliable data.</li> </ul>
<i>Turnover</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A three-year average of the percent of full-time teachers who leave their school each year</li> <li>Using school-level turnover, as opposed to teachers who leave the district, is the best way to understand which schools are most impacted.</li> </ul>
<i>Chronic teacher absenteeism</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The percent of teachers absent 10 or more days per year</li> </ul>
<i>Late hires</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The percent of teachers hired after the first day teachers report in their school buildings</li> </ul>

Note: More information about these definitions is available in [Ensuring Equitable Access to Strong Teachers: Important Elements of an Effective State Action Plan](#).

To analyze the data, large districts should consider starting with a quartile analysis using the selected indicators. Begin by categorizing schools into four groups based on concentrations of low-income students and/or students of color, and examine whether inequities in teacher indicators exist between groups. Smaller districts that have too few schools to group into four categories might start out by examining districtwide patterns, comparing their data with state benchmarks, and then reviewing individual school data. This can lead district teams to ask more nuanced equity questions to guide further analysis.

## KEY QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

### 1. Which indicators show inequities?

### 2. Are the same sets of schools disadvantaged along multiple indicators?

### 3. Are there additional ways to disaggregate the data that could help focus action at a later stage?

- Individual components of an evaluation system (observation results, measures of student growth, etc.)
- Turnover among more versus less effective teachers
- Types of turnover (transfers between schools, movement out of the district, retirements)
- Vacancies and/or late hires by subject area
- Schools with predominantly black *or* Latino student populations (this can be helpful in homogeneous districts where most schools serve large populations of students of color)

Common Challenge	How Other Districts Have Approached It
<i>Agreeing on indicators of teacher quality</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District leaders often have differing perspectives on how to best measure teacher quality. Many districts have reached consensus by examining multiple metrics, since no single indicator tells the whole story. For example, a district team may look at evaluation ratings to understand teacher performance, but also look at retention, since effectiveness has a limited impact if teachers are leaving from year to year.</li> </ul>
<i>Accessing high-quality data that can be analyzed</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many districts have uncovered data inaccuracies while doing deep analysis, but have been careful not to allow imperfect data to indefinitely stall action.</li> <li>• District staff have worked directly with data vendors to access relevant data. For example, one district team was unable to access teacher vacancy numbers using their data system, so a staff member worked with the vendor to develop a workaround that allowed the district to pull the data by school.</li> </ul>
<i>Adapting the analysis to the local context</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some districts have examined classifications of schools that are locally relevant such as those identified for intervention by the state accountability system.</li> </ul>
<i>Having the vast majority of teachers rated as effective or highly effective under an evaluation system</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Districts have focused on differences between teachers in a top rating category (e.g., “highly effective”) versus lower tiers (e.g. “effective,” “developing,” and “ineffective”).</li> <li>• Other districts have analyzed the data from individual components of the evaluation system, such as classroom observations or student growth measures, in order to get more nuanced data than a summative rating.</li> </ul>

## CHOOSE FOCUS AREAS

ARTICULATE DISTRICT FOCUS AREAS BASED ON DATA TRENDS, INCLUDING KEY TEACHER INEQUITIES AND SCHOOLS IMPACTED.

### WHAT TO DO:

Select one to two key indicators of teacher quality that the district will monitor and work to improve over the upcoming two to three years. District teams should select indicators based on 1) how they impact student learning and experience, and 2) how inequitably they are distributed across the district. Districts can then prioritize schools that are most affected by inequities.

### KEY QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

#### *Choosing teacher indicators:*

1. How do selected indicators interact with the indicators prioritized and monitored by the state?
2. How will the district communicate to district staff, educators, parents, and the community about prioritized indicators?

#### *Choosing schools:*

3. Which subset of schools has the greatest need and will be prioritized?
  - Is there a category of schools that is most affected by inequities, such as high-poverty schools or schools identified by the state accountability system?
  - Are some schools disadvantaged across multiple teacher indicators?
4. Has the district or state already prioritized a group of schools for other human capital or school improvement reforms? Depending on context, the district may develop a rationale for prioritizing *or not prioritizing* this group.

Common Challenge	How Other Districts Have Approached It
<p><i>Narrowing the focus from many indicators of teacher quality to a few</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some districts have outlined an ideal number of focus areas before beginning the discussion about which to prioritize (e.g., one to two).</li> <li>• To help prioritize, districts have categorized problems into two buckets: those that may be low-hanging fruit, like chronic absenteeism, versus those that might require a longer term strategy, such as those that require improvements in instructional quality or culture. This categorization can help districts ensure they are taking manageable steps to ameliorate the problem.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Focusing on an indicator that cannot be monitored from year to year (e.g., examining effectiveness when the state or district is planning changes to the evaluation system)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Although districts strive to collect and report data similarly from year to year, sometimes changes are inevitable. Some districts have chosen to monitor proxy measures that they know will remain consistent, such as novice rates, even if leaders think a less consistent measure (like evaluation ratings) may eventually be more meaningful.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Balancing districtwide human capital demands, while maintaining an equity focus for a subset of schools or group of students</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many districts are already implementing a districtwide human capital plan, but still need to prioritize action in schools where teacher inequities are most stark. For example, one district team wanted to improve districtwide retention, but also prioritized a set of high-poverty schools where turnover was particularly high and teachers were disproportionately transferring within-district.</li> </ul>

# IDENTIFY ROOT CAUSES

DEFINE THE PROCESSES, POLICIES, AND SYSTEMS THAT ARE CONTRIBUTING TO INEQUITIES.

## WHAT TO DO:

Start to build an understanding of the factors that contribute to inequities by reviewing the policies and processes that might be contributing to the prioritized problems. In addition, share the focus areas (*from stage 2*) with those who best understand the problem, such as district staff, principals, teachers, and parents. With these sources of input, identify as many potential drivers of the problem as possible. Then, brainstorm potential drivers of those factors to get to an increasing level of specificity on underlying issues. Finally, prioritize three to four factors that are 1) most related to the problem and 2) most actionable at the district level.

Lastly, develop a plan to assess whether those prioritized factors are, in fact, driving the problem. For example, the district may want to consult additional data, surveys, focus groups, or conduct site visits to understand which underlying issues are most pervasive.

## KEY QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- 1. Which stakeholders have the most knowledge of underlying factors contributing to the problem (e.g., district personnel, principal supervisors, principals, teachers, teacher prep program personnel, or parent or community organizations)?**
- 2. How do district actions influence working conditions – which affect teacher performance and retention – in prioritized schools? Is the district:**
  - Supporting principals to build healthy cultures?
  - Inundating schools with too many programs or initiatives?
  - Balancing accountability pressure with support, resources, and development opportunities?
  - Helping schools implement collaborative planning structures for teachers?
- 3. What are the district systems or levers that touch the main drivers of the problem? Some examples include:**

Root Cause	District Levels Available
<b>Inadequate supply of teachers:</b> evidenced by insufficient application numbers and/or high late-hire rates in specific subjects or grades	Recruitment levers include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnerships with preparation programs</li> <li>• Compensation</li> <li>• Hiring timelines</li> <li>• Certification assistance</li> </ul>
<b>Difficulty attracting teachers to some schools:</b> evidenced by insufficient application numbers and/or high late-hire rates only at certain schools	Placement levers include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compensation and incentives</li> <li>• Principal placement</li> <li>• Principal training/support</li> <li>• Priority hiring timelines</li> <li>• Ensuring schools are well-resourced</li> <li>• School working conditions</li> </ul>
<b>Difficulty retaining teachers at some schools:</b> evidenced by school-level turnover rates at certain schools	Retention levers include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compensation and incentives</li> <li>• Principal placement</li> <li>• Teacher leadership and advancement opportunities</li> <li>• Teacher recognition</li> <li>• School working conditions</li> </ul>
<b>Difficulty growing teacher talent in some schools:</b> evidenced by lack of change in effectiveness ratings	Development levers include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional development</li> <li>• Principal supervision and support</li> <li>• Evaluation</li> <li>• Mentorship and coaching</li> <li>• Certification assistance</li> </ul>
<b>Difficulty managing human capital at some schools:</b> evidenced by a combination of indicators, such as school-level turnover, late hires, teacher satisfaction, and/or teacher effectiveness	School leader levers include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal supervision</li> <li>• Principal preparation</li> <li>• Principal professional development</li> <li>• Principal placement</li> <li>• Data reporting and sharing</li> </ul>

Common Challenge	How Other Districts Have Approached It
<b>Difficulty distinguishing among underlying factors and how they contribute to the problem</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Districts that have listened to the perspectives of diverse sets of stakeholders (district personnel, principals, teachers, parents) are better equipped to identify patterns across groups and prioritize root causes.</li> </ul>
<b>Inability to see the central office's responsibility in changing the underlying factors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many district offices acknowledge that they are not causing the problem, but can still identify district policies and practices that contribute to it.</li> </ul>

## EXAMPLE

A leader in one of our partner districts believes there are two kinds of school employees: teachers and the people who support teachers. “We want to make this district a place where it is rewarding to work and where teachers have opportunities,” she says. “Because they won’t stay where they don’t have the opportunity.”

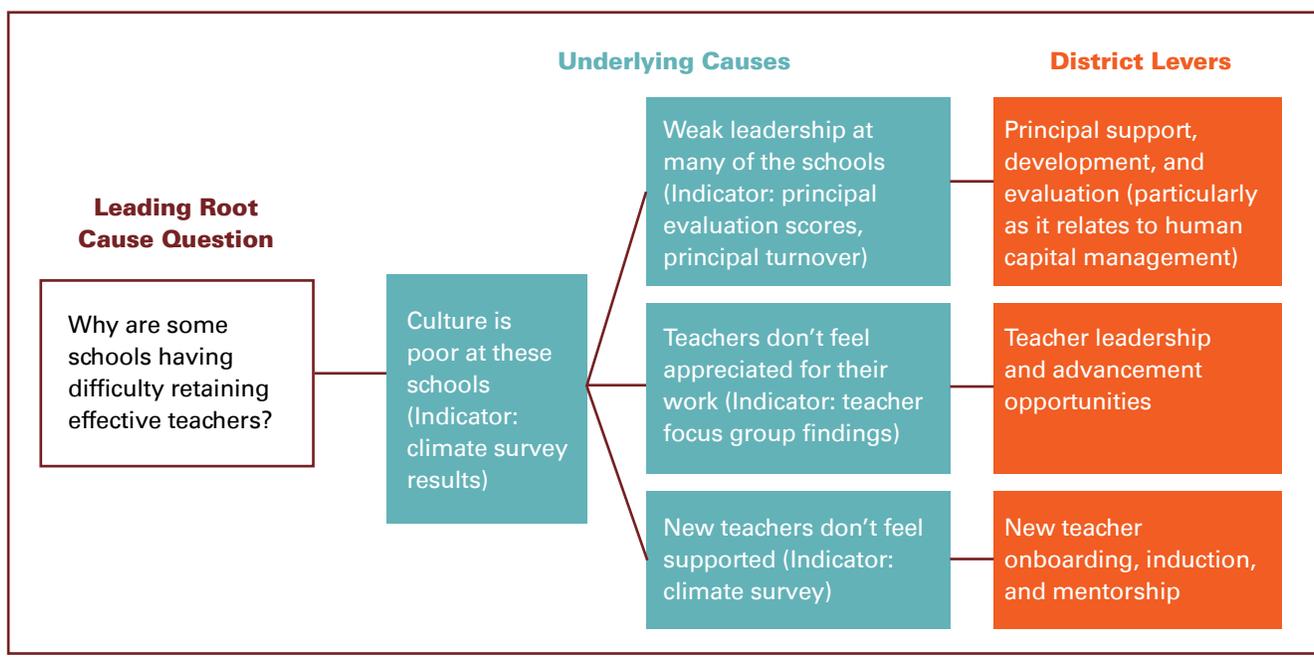
But up until recently, the district didn’t have a systematic plan to keep teachers in the district, an issue that surfaced during a routine human capital data review. About 80 percent of teachers in the district remained in their schools from 2014 to 2015, yet this figure masked a great deal of variation across the district. In some of the highest poverty schools, fewer than 50 percent of teachers remained.

The human capital team wanted to take action fast, but knew that a districtwide commitment would require buy-in across the central office. So, the team started a teacher retention working group to bring multiple perspectives to the table. At the group’s first two meetings, team members dove deep into research and the district’s own retention data and learned three important things:

1. Not all retention is equal: The group placed a premium on retaining effective educators in high-poverty schools. The good news was that the retention rate for effective teachers was slightly higher than for teachers with lower evaluation ratings, but there was still room for improvement.
2. Not all high-poverty schools had a problem: At five of these schools, retention rates topped 90 percent.
3. School culture was often the culprit: The team carefully examined teacher survey results at schools with low and high retention rates, and found that the teachers at low-retention schools consistently rated their school leadership, collaboration among faculty, and management of student discipline lower than at other schools in the state.

The district narrowed its focus in light of these revelations, directing efforts toward teachers rated effective or higher in schools with retention rates lower than 70 percent.

The team understood that culture was at the root of the problem, but needed to work with other stakeholders to reach a shared understanding of the meaning of “culture” and articulate what the district could do about it. They identified potential underlying causes of the retention problem using school climate surveys and focus groups, and then described the district levers that touched those underlying causes. Based on this initial work, the working group felt ready to develop a plan, complete with goals, specific strategies, and a system for monitoring.



## SET A GOAL

ARTICULATE AN *EQUITY-ORIENTED* GOAL WITH CLEAR OUTCOMES THAT DISTRICT AND SCHOOL PERSONNEL CAN COMMIT TO IMPROVING.

### WHAT TO DO:

With key stakeholders, develop an equity goal that addresses the identified focus areas and teacher quality indicators. The goal should clearly identify the impacted schools and meet “SMART-E” criteria. (See definition below.) To determine ambitious but realistic goals, leaders can use benchmarks based on the district’s past or present performance, other exemplar districts, or state averages.

### KEY QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- 1. Does the goal meet “SMART-E” criteria?**
  - **Specific:** Is it clear and straightforward?
  - **Measurable:** Can it be measured with data?
  - **Ambitious:** Is it a stretch for the district?
  - **Reasonable:** Is it realistic and achievable?
  - **Timely:** Is it attached to a time frame?
  - **Equity-oriented:** Are prioritized schools or student populations embedded in the goal?
- 2. How many schools, teachers, or students would have to be reached in order to achieve the desired impact?**
- 3. How does the goal align with other district priorities?**

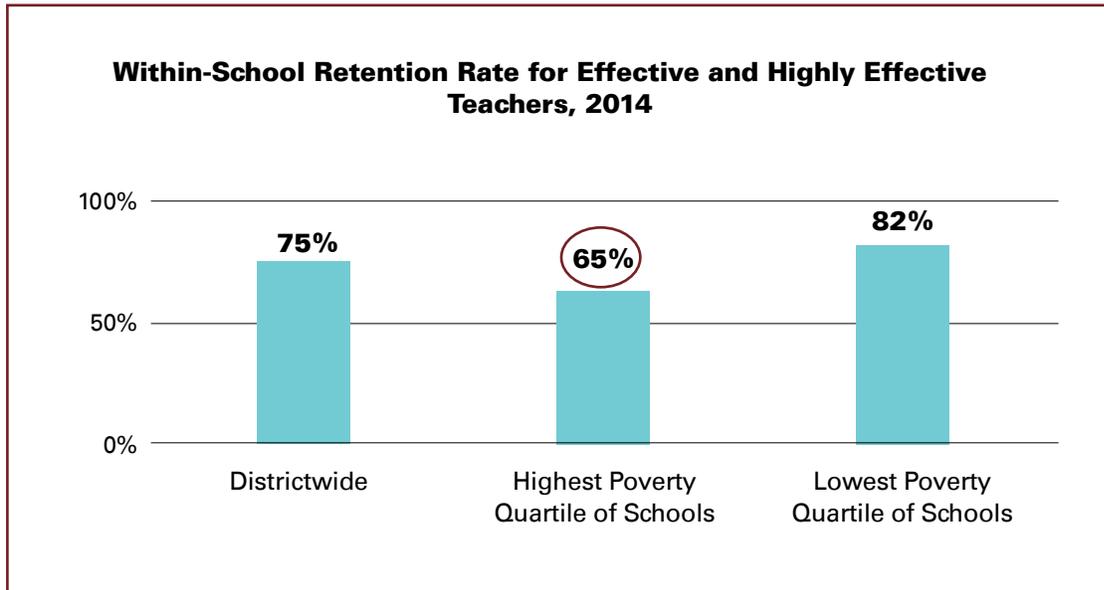
Common Challenge	How Other Districts Have Approached It
<i>Communicating a goal about equity to a broad set of stakeholders, including those who don't directly benefit</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Districts have framed the goal by emphasizing teachers' opportunity to make an especially large difference for students and highlighting other student benefits. One district experienced a great deal of buy-in with its equity goal by relentlessly communicating to both high- and low-poverty school communities the value and impact the very best teachers could make in high-poverty schools.</li> </ul>

## EXAMPLES

### GOAL:

In two years, the district will increase retention of effective and highly effective teachers in 35 high-poverty schools by 10 percentage points.

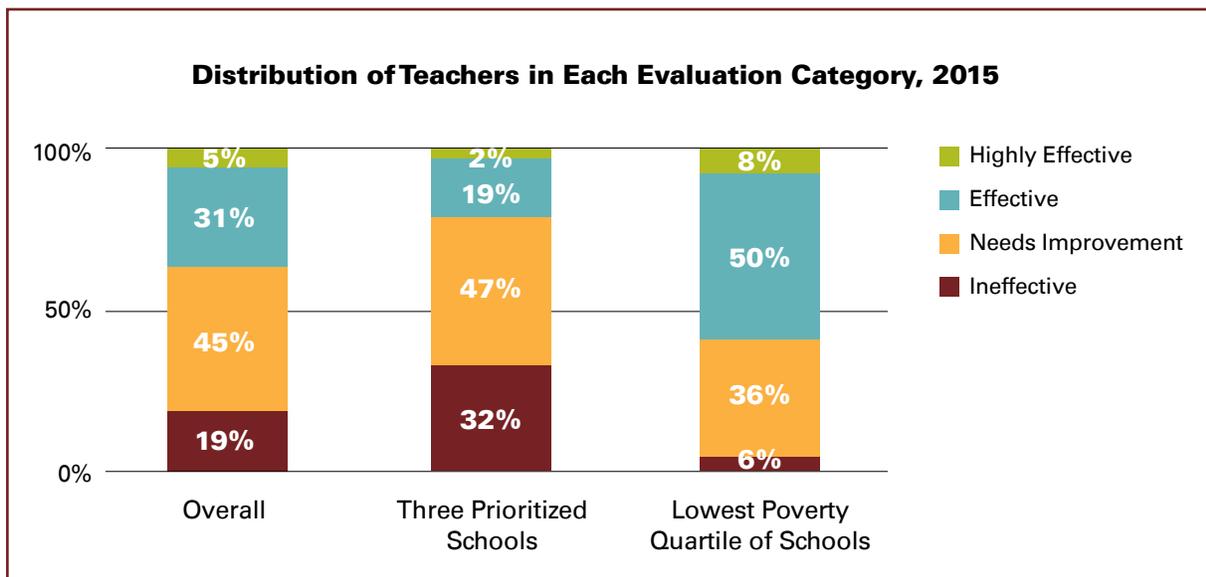
### BASELINE DATA:



### GOAL:

The district will increase the percentage of teachers rated as effective or higher in three prioritized schools from 21 percent to 50 percent in the next three years.

### BASELINE DATA:



## SELECT STRATEGIES

REFLECT ON WHETHER EXISTING STRATEGIES WILL ACHIEVE THE DESIRED GOAL, AND IF NOT, ADAPT THEM AND FILL IN THE GAPS WITH NEW STRATEGIES.

### WHAT TO DO:

First, brainstorm existing state and district strategies, ranging from human capital policies to broader teaching and learning initiatives, which might be related to the district's goal. Then, evaluate existing strategies for 1) their alignment with root causes and 2) the impact they would have on the goal if the district continued with them. Reflect on whether current strategies should be continued, modified, or discontinued. And last, brainstorm new strategies that would help fill in the gap between current strategies and the goal, and apply similar criteria.

### KEY QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. How could existing strategies be adapted to impact more or different schools, teachers, or students?
2. Could communication be improved to increase the potential impact of existing strategies?
3. Which district levers are aligned with root causes but currently underutilized? Could these be developed into new strategies? *(See stage 3 for a list of district levers.)*
4. Is the state providing any resources that could help the district implement particular strategies?
5. Some strategies, like methods of rewarding or recognizing excellent teachers, may be easier to implement than others. Could the district get started on some of them immediately to accomplish some "early wins"?
6. Are there combinations of strategies that could be more powerful than others?

Common Challenge	How Other Districts Have Approached It
<p><i>Misalignment between existing strategies and root causes</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Districts have had to re-prioritize or develop new strategies that are better aligned with root causes. While districts are establishing conditions to address root causes, they have temporarily continued with easy-to-implement strategies in an effort to get a “quick win.” Districts can then communicate these “wins” to stakeholders as justification to do the hard work ahead.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Existing strategies address teacher quality across the district, rather than prioritizing certain schools or populations with the greatest inequities.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some districts have modified existing strategies so that they impact schools/students differentially. For example, one district had previously developed a series of teacher leadership opportunities, but didn’t see much movement in its highest poverty schools. So, the district modified its approach by giving priority for those opportunities to teachers in the highest poverty schools. Another district moved back its hiring timelines to allow schools adequate time to fill positions, but gave principals of prioritized schools the earliest window to hire the strongest candidates.</li> </ul>
<p><i>A focus on too many strategies without a clear prioritization</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some districts have used the one-hand rule: The number of strategies (or priorities) should be five or fewer.</li> <li>• Districts have had to make tough decisions not to prioritize some existing strategies in order to focus on only a few impactful strategies.</li> <li>• Districts that think through the implications of not prioritizing existing efforts are usually able to communicate better about the focus areas.</li> </ul>
<p><i>New strategies don’t align with broader district priorities or initiatives.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When alignment is not plainly apparent, districts have had to consider whether (and how) they will get buy-in from other stakeholders in the district.</li> </ul>

# EXAMPLE

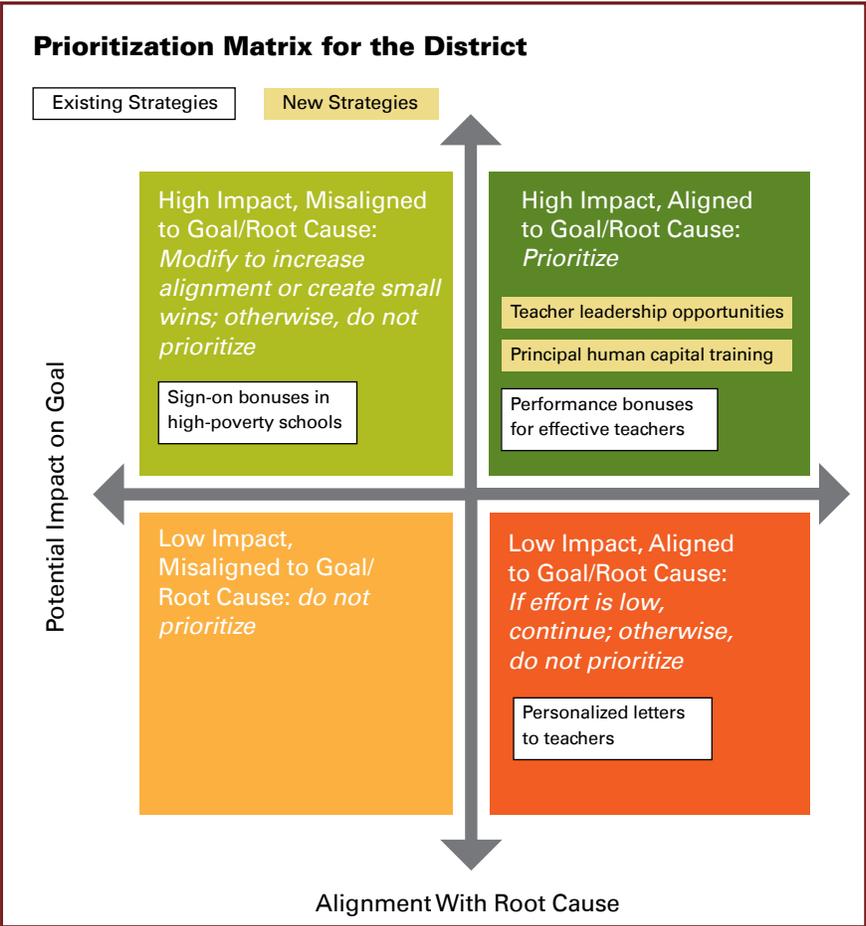
Two years ago, one of our partner districts discovered that effective teachers were leaving high-poverty schools in droves. When a district staffing specialist conducted an exit interview with one of these teachers, she heard something that sounded so simple: “No one had ever asked me to stay,” the teacher said.

The specialist responded quickly, designing a letter-writing initiative to prevent this trend from continuing. District staff sent personal letters to effective teachers in high-poverty schools thanking them for their work, explicitly asking them to stay another year, and inviting their feedback about what the district could do better.

The results were promising, albeit inconclusive: Teachers who received these letters had a turnover rate about 2 percentage points lower than a similar group of teachers the year before.

The following year, when the district committed to a more holistic effort to curb turnover among effective teachers in high-poverty schools, the letter-writing campaign seemed like a promising strategy to continue. But on its own, it wouldn’t change the larger turnover patterns; the district would need to pursue additional strategies.

A team of district leaders examined the initiatives that already existed and evaluated their impact on the goal and their alignment with the root cause (a lack of recognition and advancement opportunities). For example, the district already had a compensation system in place to reward teachers for taking positions in high-poverty schools and for getting strong evaluation results. The team realized that, although the sign-on bonuses helped get teachers in the door, they were doing little to retain excellent teachers. So, the team decided to discontinue the sign-on bonuses, freeing up some resources that could be committed otherwise.



When brainstorming new ideas, district leaders asked themselves: How could they bring the intention of the letter-writing campaign to the school level? They suggested that principals also needed to be recognizing strong talent. To fill this gap, the district committed to training principals to identify and acknowledge their best teachers.

In addition, the team had developed an emerging district initiative to create leadership opportunities for effective teachers. The team decided that if they modified this effort to offer the opportunities to teachers in the district’s highest poverty schools, the initiative would have more of an impact on their equity goal.

The team then planned to assess the impact of these new strategies in a year.

## FLESH OUT STRATEGIES

FULLY DESCRIBE THE TARGETED SET OF STRATEGIES THE DISTRICT WILL EMPLOY TO REDUCE INEQUITIES.

### WHAT TO DO:

Develop the details of each strategy the district has prioritized (*stage 5*). At a minimum, districts may choose to articulate: a description of the strategy, a theory of action, desired scale, required resources, an owner, and a plan for communicating to stakeholders.

Given the importance of communication, district leaders can start by 1) identifying all individuals who would need to act in order for the strategy to be carried out, 2) identifying groups of stakeholders who can help generate support and buy-in for the strategy, and 3) developing differentiated approaches for messaging the goal and strategies to different groups of stakeholders.

### KEY QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Does the district already have the capacity to implement the strategy, or will it need to partner with other organizations or reallocate internal resources to carry it out?
2. To successfully implement each strategy, how will district departments need to collaborate?
3. What are the most predictable obstacles, and how can the district avoid them?

Common Challenge	How Other Districts Have Approached It
<i>Ensuring that the strategy continues to align with the goal once it is broken down into manageable pieces</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By revisiting the goal after developing the strategy, districts have been able to double-check that the theory of action still holds.</li> </ul>
<i>Difficulty securing resources</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Districts have utilized 1) such federal resources as the Teacher and School Leader Incentive Fund (formerly TIF) or Title II, 2) existing district resources that can be reallocated, and 3) private grant funding.</li> <li>• If adequate resources could not be secured, districts have had to revisit their desired scale.</li> </ul>
<i>Identifying all the people who need to be informed of the strategy and communicating it in a way that enhances buy-in</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One district piloted the communication plan with a subset of district staff, principals, and teachers, and asked for feedback from each group. The district then rolled out the communication plan fully.</li> <li>• Another district relied on individuals in various roles (principals, teachers, parents, etc.) who supported the goal to communicate about the strategy to like stakeholders.</li> </ul>

## EXAMPLE

**Goal:** Increase the percent of effective teachers in the district's lowest performing schools by 10 percentage points over three years.

**Root Cause:** Teachers are not receiving adequate feedback from their principals.

**Detailed District Strategy:** Improving teacher performance through principal supervision and support

<p><i>What is the strategy?</i></p>	<p>Principal supervisors will spend time each month 1) observing teachers with principals, 2) assisting principals with providing feedback, and 3) helping principals align their feedback with capacity-building resources.</p> <p>Principal supervisors will also provide group training to principals related to effective coaching and feedback.</p>
<p><i>What is the theory of action?</i></p>	<p>If principal supervisors provide quality training and one-on-one coaching related to the observation and feedback cycle, then principals will improve their ability to provide feedback to teachers, and teachers will improve their instructional practice.</p>
<p><i>How many schools and teachers will the strategy affect?</i></p>	<p>The district will focus its efforts with the principals in the 13 lowest performing schools, where a total of 638 full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers work.</p> <p>Principal supervisors will focus their one-on-one coaching on observation cycles with 408 teachers who received evaluation ratings lower than "highly effective." These teachers collectively serve 12,237 students.</p>
<p><i>What resources (people, time, money) will be necessary?</i></p>	<p>The leaders of the 13 schools are spread among four principal supervisors, who will receive additional training.</p> <p>The district will partner with an outside leadership development organization to plan principal training and implementation processes.</p> <p>The district will also set aside resources to invest in teacher development and coaching, depending on differentiated needs within schools.</p>
<p><i>Who will be responsible for the strategy?</i></p>	<p>Assistant superintendent for leadership development</p>
<p><i>What is the communications plan?</i></p>	<p>The district will communicate to principal supervisors, principals in the 13 schools, and their staff.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Messaging to principal supervisors will stress the supervisors' own view that principals need development in this area.</li> <li>• Messaging to principals will emphasize the district's commitment to principal development and the primary role of the principal as an instructional leader.</li> <li>• Messaging to teachers will emphasize the district's commitment to teacher development and the shared belief in teachers' ability to improve student learning.</li> </ul> <p>The district will tap principal supervisors, principals, and teachers who support the strategy to deliver some communication.</p> <p>Communication channels include leadership development team meetings, principal meetings, school staff meetings, emails, and newsletters.</p>

## MONITOR PROGRESS

DEVELOP PROCESSES FOR EXECUTING, MONITORING,  
AND ADJUSTING THE EQUITY-FOCUSED STRATEGIES THAT  
ARE IMPLEMENTED.

### WHAT TO DO:

Identify key process milestones and leading indicators of success, and articulate a timeline for achieving each. Articulate the chain of people who will be involved in implementation so that the strategy travels from the district office to the prioritized schools and teachers. Determine who is responsible for progress monitoring and schedule routine meetings to share successes and challenges, and plan for adjustments.

### KEY QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. What will success look like at various points in time? (Three months? Six months? One year? Three years?)
2. Which data/information related to root causes will inform the team's regular progress check-ins (e.g., data from school climate surveys, exit surveys, teacher or leader evaluations, expenditures, human resource tracking systems)?
3. Do process timelines align with timelines for other district activities?
4. How will the district determine mid-course corrections if anticipated progress does not occur?

Common Challenge	How Other Districts Have Approached It
<p><i>Turnover of senior leadership within the district</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Districts have institutionalized strategies by clearly documenting the rationale and process for monitoring progress in order to mitigate the impact of district leadership changes.</li> <li>• Districts that successfully communicate the strategy throughout the district office typically have multiple supporters who can advocate for the strategy even after key personnel leave the district.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Strategy gets lost amid other priorities in the district (e.g., process milestones end up being light touches, if they occur at all).</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The development of regular check-ins has helped some districts, as team members feel responsible to fulfill process targets before scheduled check-in meetings.</li> <li>• By informing the board of the equity goal and strategies, and promising to report regularly, district officials can commit to regular public attention on both activity and results.</li> <li>• Districts have developed systems of accountability for completing the strategies, such as embedding implementation responsibilities and/or results into district job descriptions and performance reviews. Districts have also found it helpful to partner with other districts, businesses, or nonprofit organizations to help hold themselves responsible.</li> <li>• Districts have secured grant money for a strategy, making them accountable to an outside organization or institution.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Difficulty adapting in a timely fashion when implementation challenges arise, resulting in a loss of support for the strategy</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Districts that create routine meetings to monitor progress are often more adaptable when challenges occur.</li> </ul>

## EXAMPLE

One of our partner districts was implementing a performance-based compensation system in 20 high-poverty, low-performing schools. Incentives included 1) sign-on bonuses to attract highly effective teachers who'd been working elsewhere in the district and 2) performance bonuses for teachers in these schools who had effective evaluation ratings and had completed professional development. Below are abbreviated process and progress monitoring timelines:

### TIMELINE FOR YEAR 1 OF IMPLEMENTATION:

	Process Milestones	Leading Indicators to Monitor
<i>Quarter 1 (Summer)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project first-year costs and allocate federal grant money toward the program</li> <li>Develop/implement communication plan to teachers and principals in district</li> <li>Recruit highly effective teachers to transfer to target schools through individual teacher outreach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Projected costs, budget</li> <li>Number/type of vacancies in target schools</li> <li>Number of applications</li> <li>Number of applications from highly effective teachers</li> </ul>
<i>Quarter 2 (Fall)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement recruitment bonuses</li> <li>Develop mid-year survey about teacher satisfaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Late hire rate</li> <li>Percent of vacancies filled by highly effective teachers</li> <li>Sign-on bonuses paid out</li> </ul>
<i>Quarter 3 (Winter)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collect and analyze mid-year survey data</li> <li>Forecast future costs and generate plan for program stability, including identification of additional grants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Percent of teachers reporting they will remain in their schools, disaggregated by prior effectiveness AND membership in the incentive cohort</li> <li>Projected costs, budget</li> </ul>
<i>Quarter 4 (Spring)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement performance bonuses</li> <li>Analyze professional development needs for teachers in target schools</li> <li>Write additional grant proposals</li> <li>Make adjustments to recruitment strategy and bonus structure (if necessary)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Percent of contracts renewed, disaggregated by current effectiveness rating</li> <li>Performance bonuses paid out</li> <li>Performance indicators for teachers who did not receive bonuses (evaluation data, professional development completion)</li> </ul>

This strategy involved staff from the human capital office, the office of the chief financial officer, and the research and accountability office. To ensure that implementation was running smoothly, staff from these offices met monthly to monitor leading indicators, discuss implementation challenges, and course correct as appropriate.



The Education Trust